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Senators ponder plugs for a leaky ship of state

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Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole has been given a report calling for a major overhaul of the way the Senate handles classified information, according to Senate aides.

The establishment of a central Senate office to collect information on all staff holding security clearances, as well as all classified papers delivered to Senate offices, has been highlighted as a centerpiece of the new procedures.

The recommendations, resulting from a three-month joint study by the Senate Committees on Rules, Governmental Affairs and Intelligence were delivered to Mr. Dole's office this week.

Final decisions on which new procedures will be recommended to the full Senate for approval will be made when Mr. Dole sits down with the chairmen and ranking minority members of the three committees.

"Everyone in the Senate agrees

that security needs to be tightened up," said a Senate aide familiar with the report.

Mr. Dole and the other senators are expected to act on the draft recommendations soon.

Mr. Dole ordered the three committees to initiate the study in a letter sent separately to their chairmen on Dec. 27, 1985.

"A comprehensive review of Senate procedures for dealing with classified information" was needed, according to the letter. "The recent series of criminal cases involving the unauthorized disclosure of classified information to foreign governments" provoked the concern about Senate security.

Congressional concern about security was triggered by the arrest last December of an employee of a private company hired to transcribe classified House Armed Services Committee hearing records. The employee was discovered trying to sell the classified transcript to a Soviet representative.

According to the December letter from Mr. Dole, the committees' review focused on three specific goals:

- Eliminating, if at all possible, any use of non-Senate personnel to handle classified information for the Senate.

- Reducing the number of Senate staffers with access to classified information.

- Ensuring that all Senate offices handle classified information in a uniform and acceptable way.

No similar wide-ranging review of House procedures for handling classified information is known to be under way, but the Clerk of the House decided, in the wake of the transcript discovery, that classified transcripts would only be handled by House employees.

"The risks of using outside personnel to transcribe classified hearing proceedings had long been a concern of the House Armed Services Committee," said a committee aide.

Senate sources say that rules under consideration for governing classified information will be comprehensive and will "rely heavily on existing executive branch procedures for the handling of such information."

"The guidelines will cover procedures to be followed when the material is delivered to a Senate office, how and where documents are to be stored, who has access to the information once it has been accepted and placed in its approval storage areas, and the manner in which classified papers should be discarded once they are no longer needed by the Senate office keeping it," the sources said.

A process of regular accounting for all classified documents in all Senate files is also expected to be put into place.

One Senate source thought the current Intelligence Committee would be well organized to act as a clearinghouse for controlling records of classified information and staff approved to handle it. Another suggested that the Senate Office of Classified National Security Information would be suited to the clearinghouse tasks.

The unclassified draft report, about 50 pages long, suggests that several specific procedures be put in place:

- Printing of a model Senate secu-

rity manual, already drafted by the Senate Intelligence Committee and included in the study, to be provided to all Senate staff authorized to handle classified papers.

- Designation of one central office to keep the names of all staff with security clearances, the classification level of information they can receive, and records of the documents delivered to them.

"For example," a Senate aide explained, "the central office would know where a particular Senate office kept its safe approved to store secret or top secret information, what papers are in the safe, and which staff are authorized to have access to those papers."

Intelligence information is not allowed to be stored in individual Senate offices.

- Requiring each Senate office to handle records of classified documents in a uniform manner.

- Requiring all Senate staff to be briefed on how to handle classified information when they receive their security clearances.

- Improvement of physical security of certain Senate offices storing especially sensitive documents.

- Redesign of some facilities to eliminate current security risks, such as those posed by public telephones located in hearing rooms now used to discuss intelligence information in supposedly protected environments.

Senate offices are not the only ones being criticized for lax handling of classified information on Capitol Hill.

"I was shocked to discover secret documents left for me — in an unmarked envelope — with our receptionist," confided a Senate aide new to the Hill who had worked with classified information inside the executive branch for many years.

"Inside the plain envelope was a second sealed envelope stamped secret and a receipt for me to sign and send back to the Pentagon office which had delivered the package."

"If that Pentagon practice occurs," said a Senate staffer who had worked on the new report, "it would not be very helpful to Senate efforts to tighten up."